

MISEMBODIED

Pilot
("Get Right With TROD")

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based on the novel of the same title

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FADE IN:

INT. AIRPORT GATE -- DAY

VERONICA THOMSEN (42) steps off her flight and into the main gate area. She walks toward a kiosk of monitors in the airport concourse corridor. There she sets her carryons down, next to a screen displaying a local TV news program

WEATHER FORECASTER (ON TV)
The rest of Memorial Day weekend
looks good, though pack an umbrella
for Monday. Chance of rain could
complicate cookout plans.

The chyron rolling beneath the weather forecast reads "Up
Next: 2009 Summer Blockbusters to Help Beat the Heat."

On the next bank of screens, displaying Arrival and Departure gate information, an out-of-place sticker has been slapped onto the side of the kiosk. The shimmering, silver sticker is of a very colorful, glittery butterfly.

FLASHBACK

INT. AIRPORT GATE -- DAY (6 WEEKS EARLIER)

ISAAC THOMSEN (42) steps off his flight and into the same main gate area. Stopping at the Arrivals and Departures kiosk, he parks his carryons briefly. As he roots through his backpack, he notices a 3 YEAR-OLD GIRL racing around a nearby row of gate seating. The girl makes eye contact with Isaac and shows off a new, sparkly butterfly bling sticker. Isaac smiles, as the kid mischievously takes the sticker's backing off. She runs up to the kiosk and sticks the sticker onto the kiosk's side. And the MOM freaks out.

MOM AT AIRPORT
Skyler!! What did I tell you –
don't put stickers on things that
aren't yours!!

The Mom grabs her kid in no uncertain terms, and Isaac pulls out his flip phone from his pocket and checks the time. He heads to a quiet corner the next gate over.

ISAAC
(to himself as he's
carting his stuff over to
an unoccupied bench)
Shit, shit, shit.

Isaac grabs a folder from his backpack. Placing a call, he speaks in a surprisingly feminine voice.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
 (into his phone)
Hi, is this Prisha? Prisha, yes, it's Veronica. ... Yeah, fine, thanks. ... No, no, my flight just got in. And...

He turns to face the wall, hiding himself from passersby.

ISAAC (CONT'D)
Oh, goodness, could we?... Wow, thank you so much. ... Still need to freshen up at the hotel. Like 3:15? ... So, OK, see you all then. Really, super appreciate it.

END FLASHBACK

INT. AIRPORT LUGGAGE CLAIM AREA -- DAY

On her flip phone, VERONICA taps out a T9 text message. But no luggage on the conveyor belt yet. So she takes the opportunity to use the women's room.

INT. AIRPORT WOMEN'S ROOM -- DAY

VERONICA enters a buzzy-bright fluorescent lit bathroom whose trashcan overflows with brown paper towels. Like a newbie, she mutters to herself in a revealingly masculine vocal tone.

VERONICA
 (gruffly, to herself)
Welcome home, lady.

A CONTENTIOUS WOMAN stands at the sink and does a double-take. She eyes Veronica witheringly.

CONTENTIOUS WOMAN
Excuse me, this isn't the men's room.

VERONICA
 (still a bit out of register)
Sorry?

CONTENTIOUS WOMAN
 (pointing out the door)
Sir??

VERONICA
 (collects herself, back to
 her feminine voice)
 Ma'am, I'm a woman.

Veronica tries to get into a bathroom stall, but Contentious Woman doubles down. Her glare is unmistakable.

VERONICA (CONT'D)
 I'm so tired, my voice sometimes
 gets gruff at the end of a long
 day. ... Can you please?

Contentious Woman relents and lets Veronica pass by. Veronica steps inside and closes the stall door.

TIME CUT:

The toilet's autoflush sounds as Veronica steps back out. The Woman, turning around from primping at the mirror, sounds chastened.

CONTENTIOUS WOMAN
 (to Veronica)
 Look, sorry. Just that, some men
 try to...

VERONICA
 No, it's OK. Got it.

CONTENTIOUS WOMAN
 I'm just...

VERONICA
 Yes. And, hey, next time I'll try
 harder to hide my tuck.

Veronica steps toward the bathroom exit.

FLASHBACK

INT. HOTEL ROOM BATHROOM -- DAY (6 WEEKS EARLIER)

Isaac (a.k.a. FLASHBACK VERONICA) is now hurriedly putting on makeup and earrings and checking, well, her teeth for stray dabs of lipstick. Outside her bathroom is her luggage, barely unpacked. You can see scattered on the hotel bed some of the articles of male drag she'd been wearing at the airport. She assesses her rush makeup job and flashes a broad, toothy smile.

FLASHBACK VERONICA (ISAAC)
 That'll do.

INT. WORKPLACE CONFERENCE ROOM -- DAY

FLASHBACK VERONICA stands at a big conference table, in front of four people gathered around her.

FLASHBACK VERONICA
...And that's why radio feels kind
of like magic to me.

A tall and dapper man seated at the table, TRENT HABERSTAM
(45), emerges from his pensive pose.

TRENT HABERSTAM
Remarkable. We are sizably
impressed. Elaborate, please.

FLASHBACK VERONICA
Just the only queer anything I had
as a kid was the sounds of Disco
104, KFMX. From a cheap clock
radio's tiny speakers. And
everything sparkly and beautiful
that I felt from the music... that
was all me. I did that. Not the
physical clock radio. So, yeah, a
radio station's like magic. I want
to bring that to this job.

A woman with long, dark brown hair framing her ruminative,
searching hazelnut eyes, PRISHA BANERJEE (39), who is sitting
on the other side of the conference table from Trent, speaks
up.

PRISHA BANERJEE
Wonderful, Veronica. Y'know, I was
a Disco 104 fan as a little kid.

Veronica nods.

PRISHA (CONT'D)
My big brother was a total Disco
104 queen.

TRENT
(aside, to Prisha)
Sidney, right? That... drag...
fellow?

PRISHA
(assuring Trent)
Yes. Siddhartha. But, just Sid. You
met him.

TRENT
We recall Sid cordially.

PRISHA
So if Sid liked the song on Disco
104, he'd let me jump on his bed.

VERONICA
(brightens)
Cool brother.

PRISHA
Sturdy bed.

A taciturn boss lady, LESLIE MAROT (55), who is sitting next to Trent, smiles slightly and nods her approval.

LESLIE MAROT
(sliding a folder of
documents across the
table to Veronica)
This is good. Veronica, welcome to
the "Listen Here!" team. You're our
new podcast and digital media
coordinator.

END FLASHBACK

INT. OFFICE BUILDING ELEVATOR LOBBY -- DAY

An elevator dings, and the doors open – revealing VERONICA, wearing a visitor's ID badge – and PRISHA. Both are dressed casually but professionally for their jobs at a public radio station.

The two cross the elevator lobby and walk toward an office entrance. The sign on the office door reads "Midwestern Public Broadcasting – Home on the Dial."

INT. OFFICE LOBBY AND COMMON AREA -- DAY

PRISHA swipes her ID badge and opens the door for VERONICA. Now both step into Midwestern Public Broadcasting's office lobby. Prominently placed in the waiting area is a big poster showcasing an oversized photo of Trent. The stylized caption below the pocket square in Trent's preppy blazer reads "MPB Presents 'Listen Here! featuring Trent Haberstam.'"

Prisha steps to the reception desk and offers Veronica up for inspection and consideration by PAULA ABERDEEN (72), a wary front desk staffer who's seen it all before.

PRISHA

Veronica, this is Paula. She's our eyes and ears. Doesn't let anybody in who doesn't belong here.

PAULA ABERDEEN

(to Veronica)

Do you belong here?

VERONICA

I mean, I *think* I belong here?

PAULA

Try again. You *belong* here. Say that.

VERONICA

I *belong* here.

PAULA

That's the ticket. Now off you two go.

Prisha leads Veronica over past the bank of TVs in the common area, to an empty office next to the water cooler.

PRISHA

Here. You ever had your own office before?

VERONICA

Nah, this is a first. In grad school, I shared an oversized closet with three other students.

PRISHA

The progress of a woman's career. Now you get an oversized closet of your own.

Veronica hangs her purse on a coat hanger rack by the door. She then looks back at the door.

VERONICA

(starts and then hesitates
to finish her thought)

Is this the kind of place where...

PRISHA

Where what?

VERONICA

Where you can... close your door?

PRISHA
(whispers)
Yes. But, if you do then all the
windows open.

VERONICA
(takes a beat)
Nice. Could use some air.

PRISHA
(also takes a beat,
realizes she's still
curious)
So, why...

VERONICA
(taking into her
confidence)
I'm writing a memoir.

PRISHA
(impressed)
Wow, cool. I'd be happy if I could
just rewrite my browser history.

Veronica steps over to her new desk and turns on her
computer.

PRISHA (CONT'D)
(sighs)
Well, I've got a deskload of
headaches awaiting me. Let's maybe
have lunch sometime, OK?

VERONICA
I would love that.

Prisha exits, and Veronica sits down at her desk.

But then TRENT's face pierces through the frame of Veronica's
unclosed door. He's carrying a Mount Everest-grade stainless
steel water bottle, clearly angling for a refill from the
nearby water cooler.

TRENT
Veronica, hi, welcome. The first
day. That's exciting. Getting
settled in OK?

VERONICA
Oh, hi. Yes. Thank you.
(beat)
Nice to see you, Trent.

Now dispensing water, Trent juts his neck back through the frame of Veronica's door, to continue the conversation.

TRENT
Indeed, likewise. ...
(recalling something he'd
recently heard on another
radio station)
Say, know how to spell...
Abwrackprämie?

VERONICA
Huh?

TRENT
Abwrackprämie... Germany's cash-for-clunkers program.

VERONICA
I mean... No, Trent. I don't.
Sorry.

TRENT
(a beat)
Look it up?

VERONICA
PC's not really set up yet...
'Cause, it's... Well, I...
(sighs)
Gosh. Yeah. ... Guess I could look
it up on my phone.

With heightened eyebrows, Trent waits. Veronica stands, walks across the room to her purse and punches in a T9 query on her flip phone.

VERONICA (CONT'D)
(verbalizing the internet
search she's typing in)
Cash... for... clunkers... Germany.
And... search.

She looks at her screen and, satisfied that the strange but suddenly sought-after German word is visible among her search results, she steps forward to Trent, whose water bottle is just about filled up.

TRENT
(squinting at Veronica's
tiny phone screen)
A-B-W... P-R-A-umlaut...
Abwrackprämie. Well, OK.

Trent screws the lid on his bottle and nods curtly to Veronica.

TRENT (CONT'D)
(to Veronica)
Thanks.

Trent exits. Veronica walks back to her desk to sit back down again.

VERONICA
(as she's returning to her
chair)
I mean what does it even matter?
... It's *radio*.

INT. WORKPLACE CAFETERIA -- DAY

PRISHA and VERONICA sit together for lunch, Prisha picking at the remnants of a burrito bowl. Veronica nibbles like a rabbit on her salad.

PRISHA
(shocked but not shocked)
Sakes alive, that is incredible.

VERONICA
Yeah, Ab-rack something-something.
(shrugs shoulders)
Just...

PRISHA
So classic. ... Welcome to the
team.

VERONICA
I guess. Whatever that was about.

Prisha, on Veronica's invitation, reaches across the table and grabs a couple of Veronica's fries.

PRISHA
My theory: The boss is testing the
boundaries.

VERONICA
But, *wait*, he's not the boss.
Leslie is.

PRISHA
(shakes her head)
Trent's ego always occupies the
corner suite.

VERONICA

(an "on the other hand"
tilt of her head back &
forth)

Although... I mean, Trent's also
the reason I'm here.

PRISHA

(riffing)

Really?? OK, so who's your mom?

VERONICA

(as if playing a party
game that Prisha had just
started)

She was ... a German bureaucrat. He
was an American operative. Together
they took hordes of clunker cars
off the nation's Autobahns. ...

(arriving at the big dark
reveal)

But she never told him about his
daughter. Because he never learned
to spell...

Ab-rack something-something.

PRISHA

Yes. Just what we've all been
suspecting this whole time.

VERONICA

Look, I'm just saying... Trent has
been the one pushing the station to
get into podcasting. That's why I
was hired. It's why I'm here.

PRISHA

(nods in agreement)

Sure, true. Always on the lookout
for the next thing.

VERONICA

And I don't have any complaints
against Trent. ... Er, not much of
any. Not yet at least. Though give
me the afternoon.

PRISHA

Hey, speaking of...

Prisha nods in a direction over to the side of where Veronica
is sitting, toward the cafeteria's entrance. LESLIE and TRENT
have now entered the scene, Trent haranguing his boss as if
he runs the joint.

Leslie and Trent get into the cafeteria line, which is four tables away from where Prisha and Veronica sit. But Leslie and Trent are both big-voiced enough – and arguing about something big-feeling enough – that you can hear them fine at Prisha and Veronica's table.

TRENT
(to Leslie)
He will *crush* us on fall fundraising!! Cannot let Rappaport win this one!

LESLIE
(to an insistent Trent)
I don't care about Rappaport, Trent! Focus on TROD, drop the rest. You get me?

The spirited Trent-Leslie banter continues in the background.

VERONICA
(inconspicuously, to Prisha)
What was *that* about?

PRISHA
(to Veronica)
So... Marcus Rappaport. Hosts that show "The Arts in Perspective"?

VERONICA
On MPB, right?

PRISHA
Yeah.
(laughs)
Which makes Rappaport our sworn enemy.

VERONICA
(haltingly, as if learning a new language)
OK. I guess. ... And what's TROD?

PRISHA
TRODxAspen?

VERONICA
Oh, the... that conference thing. Out in Colorado?

PRISHA
Yeah, it's an annual pilgrimage around here.

VERONICA
 So Trent's doing a TRODxAspen
 Talk...

PRISHA
 (confidentially, ensuring
 no one might hear her
 blasphemy)
 TROD as my witness, we go every
TROD-forsaken year.

Prisha smiles and waves to her coworkers in line, who seem to have reached some sort of truce, if only for the moment. Prisha then motions to Veronica to make a beeline for the trashcan and the exit.

PRISHA (CONT'D)
 (to Veronica)
 The coffee here's kinda wack. Don't
 tell 'em I said that.

Veronica nods.

PRISHA (CONT'D)
 But let me show you a bakery on
 Second Street. *Killer* double
 cappuccino.

VERONICA
 Fabulous.

Prisha dispenses with the remainders of her meal, and Veronica follows suit. Veronica follows Prisha's lead out the cafeteria exit that faces onto the street.

EXT. SUNNY LATE MAY WEEKDAY LUNCHTIME, DOWNTOWN MINNEAPOLIS -- DAY

PRISHA grabs a pair of sunglasses from her purse, VERONICA pulls out a stick of gum from her purse and pops it in her mouth. Unclear why, though. She'll be drinking coffee in less than 5 minutes. Calk it up to first-day jitters.

VERONICA
 (to Prisha)
 So, I'm kinda wondering...

PRISHA
 What you wondering?

VERONICA
 Trent and Leslie. Do you think
 they're OK about, you know, me?

PRISHA

You mean about your being...

VERONICA

Yeah. Some people get weird about it – even when they say they're down.

PRISHA

You know you kinda basically pass, right? You pretty much read like a biological or whatever...

VERONICA

Cisgender

PRISHA

Cisgender... woman.

VERONICA

Yeah, thanks. Except when I don't.

PRISHA

Nobody's perfect.

VERONICA

Like at the end of a long day – or a wrong day – or like when I'm coughing or sneezing.

PRISHA

So... Snow White unless you're sneezy, sleepy or grumpy.

VERONICA

Or cough-y.

PRISHA

Patience, almost there.

The two arrive at a stoplight and wait for the WALK sign.

PRISHA (CONT'D)

I told you about my brother, right?

VERONICA

The Disco 104 queen?

PRISHA

Yup.

Green light. They cross at the crosswalk. And then back to the sidewalk.

VERONICA

OK, but wait, is he – or she – trans?

PRISHA

No, yeah, it's he. Sid's been a drag queen around town, for decades.

VERONICA

Cool.

PRISHA

Sid has trans friends too. And I've heard them all talk about this town's strange, repressed vibes sometimes.

VERONICA

Sing it.

PRISHA

But Leslie and Trent aren't repressed. Guaranteed.

VERONICA

Look, it's just... some people can't wrap their head around trans stuff. It's like being misembodied doesn't even begin to make sense to them.

PRISHA

OK.

VERONICA

And then it becomes the trans person's problem. Which sucks.

PRISHA

Yeah, yeah...

The two arrive. Prisha opens the bakery door.

PRISHA (CONT'D)

I wonder if this barista can make a triple.

INT. OFFICE COMMON AREA -- DAY

PRISHA and VERONICA have just returned from the coffee place, coffee cups in hand.

TRENT is pacing back and forth in the common area, in front of a white board with the words "TRODxAspen 2009" at the top and a big blank space beneath. LESLIE enters from a meeting that just ended in the conference room.

TRENT
Leslie... nothing!

LESLIE
Trent, don't start with me.

Leslie rounds the corner, walks into her office and shuts the door firmly. Trent turns to his remaining audience.

TRENT
Prisha, Veronica... nothing!

VERONICA
(gamely)
So... can I help?

PRISHA
(putting up a hand,
signaling Veronica to
hold on a second)
Could I... take a whirl first?

VERONICA
(relieved)
You bet. Sure.

PRISHA
(to Trent)
What've you tried so far?

TRENT
We've searched journals, news
stories, the station archive, the
station's online message boards...

PRISHA
That bad, huh?

TRENT
We could survey the room this
afternoon...

PRISHA
The taping?

TRENT

Quite. Seasoned producers and cast members of touring musical productions. ... Surely they could help.

PRISHA

Uh-huh. So, like, "Hey, anyone here have any spare TROD Talk ideas we could steal?"

TRENT

Yes. Although perhaps in a somewhat less crass formulation.

PRISHA

We'll get back to you on that one.

TRENT

There's also our news scrapbook...

PRISHA

(mildly curious but also
not curious at all)
Do I want to know?

TRENT

Father, a newspaper man through and through, kept clippings of all his stories throughout the years, and many that he read.

PRISHA

Guess that's one way to avoid paywalls.

TRENT

We carry on the proud tradition.

PRISHA

And I suppose that means...

TRENT

(excitedly, the hunt can
now resume!)
Getting the scrapbook now.

Trent animatedly steps back to his office.

PRISHA

(to Veronica)
Something tells me we're in for it.

TIME CUT:

Leslie emerges from her office and notices Veronica sitting there.

LESLIE

Did you have an appoi... oh, we
were gonna talk at 2:30, weren't
we?

VERONICA

Uh. Yes. Yeah. About...
(looks at the figures on
her laptop screen)
About the latest numbers.

LESLIE

Good. Come in.

INT. LESLIE'S OFFICE -- DAY

VERONICA sits down in the chair across from LESLIE's desk.
PRISHA's already in the room, looking at her laptop with her
own set of spreadsheets and charts. Leslie closes the door
behind them, and takes her seat.

LESLIE

(to Veronica)
So, what you got?

TRENT opens the door without knocking and sticks his head in.

TRENT

Leslie, something wonderful. Fritz
has bold new graphics for the TROD
talk. Topic still TBD, but we've
got visuals! You should see.

LESLIE

Trent.

TRENT

(a beat)
Yes?

LESLIE

(nodding toward Veronica
and Prisha)
You knock?

TRENT

Oh.
 (looks to Veronica)
Hi, Veronica.

VERONICA

 (waves)
Hi, Trent.

TRENT

Prisha.

PRISHA

Trent.

TRENT

 (to Veronica and Prisha)
So, ladies... Fritz and I are
trying out some bold new graphics
for the talk. You should see.

LESLIE

Trent.

TRENT

Yes?

LESLIE

No.

TRENT

 (another beat, a tiny bit
 hurt)
No?

LESLIE

No.

 (waits to see if he gets
 the hint; no such luck,
 trying the more direct
 approach instead)

Go.

TRENT

 (to Veronica and Prisha)
We'll just be over in the
conference room. Maybe drop by a
little later?

LESLIE

 (now trying a redirect)
Trent? We're taping Monday. You
ready?

TRENT
We were born ready.

LESLIE
You ready to host a roundtable
discussion? Producers, directors,
actors?

TRENT
Certainly.

LESLIE
How many of their productions have
you seen?

TRENT
Huh? Well, strictly speaking, none.
But...

LESLIE
What I thought.

TRENT
Plot synopses should suffice.

LESLIE
Three shows. You've got the
weekend. You figure it out.

Trent does the math – and then turns to Veronica and Prisha.

TRENT
We may need some assistance.

PRISHA
(to Trent)
We were born ready!

VERONICA
Doesn't one of these things have a
Monday matinee?

PRISHA
(checks notes)
Yes. Monday works for me.

VERONICA
Me too, with bells on.

TRENT
(to Leslie)
You see?

LESLIE
(to Trent)
One down, two to go.

As Trent steps out under a cloud, PAULA knocks on Leslie's still-open door.

PAULA
(to Leslie)
Sorry to interrupt, there's some clown on the line from the... what's it? Ideation Something-or-other? They insisted I ask you in person.

LESLIE
(shakes her head & rolls her eyes)
The Genius Squad.

Paula sees Veronica in the room and gives a nod.

PAULA
(to Veronica)
Hi, kid.

VERONICA
Hi, Paula. I belong here.

PAULA
That's the spirit, kid.

LESLIE
(to Paula)
Some board member wants us to rebrand the show. Gotta put up with these nitwits for the next few months.

TRENT (O.S.)
Rebrand??!!

LESLIE
(to Trent, using her outside voice)
Trent, this doesn't concern you!

Trent looms now behind Paula at Leslie's office door.

TRENT
(over Paula's shoulder, to Leslie's office)
Rebrand??
(MORE)

TRENT (CONT'D)

What feral breed of outrage, what
utterly otiose, **nugatory**
proceedings are these...

LESLIE

(interrupts)

Trent, enough with the **nougat**.
Here.

Leslie throws Trent a candy bar. He catches it and looks it over.

TRENT

(to no one)

TCSHUH. Candy bars. What does she
take us for?

EXT. OUTSIDE MINNEAPOLIS'S ORPHEUM THEATER -- DAY

VERONICA stands beneath the marquee of a storied, turn-of-the-century landmark theater in downtown Minneapolis. PRISHA approaches the theater, walking up Hennepin Avenue. She's carrying an uncharacteristically oversized satchel on her shoulder.

PRISHA

(eyeing her watch)

Ugh, 10:57. So sorry, Veronica.

VERONICA

Oh good lord, no problem, of
course.

PRISHA

Just, you know, Trent.

VERONICA

What this time?

PRISHA

Half an hour ago, he turned up 4
more of his news scrapbooks.

VERONICA

Yikes.

PRISHA

Yeah, and he couldn't just hand
them off to me. Of course they
needed a whole preamble.

VERONICA

TROD works in mysterious ways.

PRISHA
(pulling out one of the
news scrapbooks from her
satchel, holding up for
Veronica's consideration)
The real mystery is why we put up
with this.

VERONICA
But why you carrying these things
now?

PRISHA
He wants to have a "rap session"
about new TROD Talk ideas after the
taping.

VERONICA
So... I guess I know what we'll be
doing at intermission.

PRISHA
(shakes head)
TROD dammit.

VERONICA
... And lunch.

PRISHA
Let us commune with a man and his
clippings.

VERONICA
But... meanwhile, let us get our
seats.

The two head into the Orpheum's luxe lobby, alongside a
busload of school kids who've just offloaded, as all warm
bodies involved make their way into the cool theater.

INT. ORPHEUM THEATER MAIN FLOOR, REAR SECTION -- DAY

VERONICA and PRISHA settle into their seats in front of a
crowd of, judging from the faces immediately surrounding
them, rowdy fourth through sixth graders. Veronica looks at
the program and gives a tempered groan.

VERONICA
"The Aristocats: The Musical."

PRISHA
Trying not to think about it.

VERONICA
Should I take notes?

PRISHA
(shakes her head, no)
Should I take a sedative?

VERONICA
(turns off her phone,
takes a beat to shift
gears to a more personal
note)
Hey, by the way, thanks for the
invite.

PRISHA
Cool, you bet.
(beat)
... So you can come to the party?

VERONICA
Totally. I haven't done a midnight
movie in forever.

PRISHA
"Freejack" is insane.

VERONICA
I remember back when "Freejack" was
playing in movie theaters.

PRISHA
Like 15, 20 years ago.

VERONICA
Starring Mick Jagger, right?

PRISHA
Yeah. And Amanda Plummer as a gun-
toting nun.

VERONICA
Some kind of time travel thing?

PRISHA
(nods)
Set in 2009.

VERONICA
The *far* future.

PRISHA

When people from the past are kidnapped and brought forward to 2009. So that rich people *in 2009* can live forever. Uploading their consciousness into hijacked bodies from the past.

VERONICA

As one does these days.

TEACHERS from the schools whose students comprise the crowd start to shush and tone down their rowdy students.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

(in a hushed tone)

Looks like show's gonna start soon.

PRISHA

(trying to look on the bright side)

I mean, we're in a gorgeous old venue to see this thing for Trent.

...

VERONICA

(seconding Prisha's take)

Watching a world-premiere musical with a crowd of kids. ...

PRISHA

The future of the musical theater filling every row. ...

Veronica reaches up to swipe something slimy off the back of her neck.

VERONICA

Be prepared to duck, though. The future of the musical theater seems to have pretty decent aim.

INT. BISTRO RESTAURANT LARGE DINING SPACE -- DAY

VERONICA and PRISHA enter the a downtown bistro in St. Paul whose mid-afternoon quiet is being harnessed – with a touch of ambiance – to serve as the backdrop for taping a field episode of "Listen Here!"

Around the room, on the walls, are signs which read,
"Listen Here! taping: Which Way Forward for the Commercial Theater? A Roundtable Discussion"

TRENT stands over by the producer's booth, taking a water break. Meanwhile panelists and crew members make their way to the catering table, to the banks of sound and recording equipment, to the podcast video and audio station – which is where Veronica now heads to, joining a scrum of other production staff.

PRISHA
(to Trent)
Got here soon as we could after
final curtain.

TRENT
(to Prisha)
Have a chance to look the
scrapbooks over?

PRISHA
Veronica and I combed through them
during intermission and then lunch.

Trent awaits Prisha's verdict. She hands Trent back his news scrapbooks.

PRISHA (CONT'D)
Nothing.

TRENT
(big sigh, and then...)
Alas.

LESLIE walks past, and against her better judgment stops to address the show's host.

LESLIE
(to Trent)
Trent, do not start. ... We'll get
a TROD topic, always do.

TRENT
We cannot abide indeterminacy.

Leslie steps to center stage and now addresses the room.

LESLIE
(projecting to the back of
the house)
Three minutes, everyone. ... And do
all your glass, plate, and
silverware clinking now. 'Cause
once we start rolling tape, we'll
be all done with that – we clear?

Veronica emerges from her podcast huddle to join Prisha and Trent.

TRENT

(to Prisha and Veronica)

By the way, how was the performance this morning, ladies?

PRISHA

Absolutely stunning architecture, that Orpheum.

VERONICA

I loved the chandelier.

Trent nods. He steps to the same center-stage spot where Leslie had just stood.

TRENT

(to the room)

Friends! We have our "Aristocats" in attendance? Did our "CHiPs: The Musical" cast arrive yet? How about the "Face/Off The Musical" team?

All who were slated to be part of this roundtable discussion are now present.

TRENT (CONT'D)

(big voice still)

Good. ... So we are here not to criticize. Only to have an open and frank discussion about the state of the commercial stage in 2009. ... So, on with the conversation!

Leslie steps forward to kick things off.

LESLIE

(to the room)

OK, let's roll tape. ... Silence everyone. Trent, start your intro in 3, 2, ...

(she points to Trent)

TRENT

(big public radio radio announcer voice)

Welcome everyone to "Listen Here!" I'm your host, Trent Haberstam. And today we're at the Grand Room in St. Paul. With a roundtable of actors, directors, and producers.

(MORE)

TRENT (CONT'D)

They're all part of big touring Broadway productions playing on stages right now, around the Twin Cities area.

Trent walks over to the first panelist of the dozen or so seated along a set of tables in the center of the room.

TRENT (CONT'D)

Let's start here, with this gentleman. What show are you part of? And what's your role?

Trent looks toward a panelist who's a shock of cool in a black tailored blazer. BRETT SCRIMSHAW leans forward to answer the host's question.

BRETT SCRIMSHAW

(to Trent)

Brett Scrimshaw. I'm producer of "Face/Off The Musical."

TRENT

And what's your show about?

SCRIMSHAW

"Face/Off The Musical" has got great songs, a great cast. It's a story about a good guy and bad guy swapping faces. It's about appearance and revenge... *and transformation.*

PRISHA

(quietly, to Veronica,
away from the mics)

So... basically when you want "Freejack" but without any of that pesky originality.

VERONICA

(quietly, back to Prisha)

...And are too lazy to time travel.

PRISHA

(keeping the riff going,
to Veronica)

I demand more gun-toting nuns.

VERONICA
 (one last, back to Prisha)
 Plus, he's calling a *face swap* a
 transformation?? Hold my estrogen.

DISSOLVE TO:

...And that's a wrap! Trent sets down his host mic at the main audio table. He now mills with cast and crew who'd just participated in the taping. Veronica leans over from the podcast production area to gab with Prisha.

VERONICA (CONT'D)
 (to Prisha, amidst the
 bustle)
 Hey. Good stuff.

PRISHA
 (to Veronica, same
 background bustle)
 Always earns his keep. Did you get
 it all?

VERONICA
 (touch of snark)
 I had it on pause the whole time.
 But other than that...

PRISHA
 Ah, rookie mistake.

Veronica gets up to get her gear ready for striking the set and loading out. Brett Scrimshaw stands up from his seat at the roundtable and approaches the catering table, next to where Veronica stands. He has a special message for a certain someone he's been eyeing during the taping.

SCRIMSHAW
 (privately, to Veronica)
 Hi there, beautiful.

VERONICA
 (to Scrimshaw, flummoxed)
 Er... well, hey, there... Did?? ...
 Look, listen... here. Hold on a
 sec, would ya??

Veronica realizes she suddenly *needs* to speak again with Prisha about one or two other loose ends. She nods back toward Scrimshaw and gives Prisha a suddenly concerned look.

VERONICA (CONT'D)

(to Prisha, seeking a
confederate)

Hey, about that party... should I
plan to bring some wine or beer or
food maybe?

Prisha surveys the lay of the land and catches herself up to
the current situation. She buys a moment to think up a plan.

PRISHA

Shawn and I are pretty set for
snacks, but if you want to bring a
bottle or two, that'd be great.

VERONICA

Done and done.

Prisha nods toward the exit, motioning to an egress that the
two could now take, away from Scrimshaw. Veronica grabs her
things, and the two set off across the room.

PRISHA

(walking Veronica out of
the room, making
conversation)

So, "Freejack"!

VERONICA

All these time-traveling, face-
swapping boys, with all their guns
blazing. They want real death-
defying action? They should try
walking in stilettos sometime.

Trent sees the commotion and wants to be part of the action.
He moves toward Prisha and Veronica. Scrimshaw sees the
emerging dynamic. If he wants to followup with his new lady
friend, he needs to hop on a boat that's sailing her way.
Suddenly Trent is his new best bud.

SCRIMSHAW

(to Trent, as the two
follow Prisha and
Veronica's lead)

Hey, so whaddya think, between
"CHiPs," "Aristocats" and us -
which one you gonna bet brings in
the most box office this year?

TRENT

A compelling conundrum...

SCRIMSHAW

Trick question. Gonna be us!

Scrimshaw is at least one person in the room convinced of his comedic brilliance. He has a grand old time laughing at his joke.

TRENT

(to Scrimshaw)

So perhaps you're privy to market projections for the coming fiscal year? ...

Prisha sees the Trent-Scrimshaw party approaching and continues to press on, with Veronica, through the tangle of staff and guests in the room.

PRISHA

You know, it's funny too. Because all these futuristic time travel movies are always about the same thing.

VERONICA

The future?

PRISHA

The outsider. The fish out of water.

VERONICA

I've heard tell about these people.

Prisha and Veronica reach the exit door, which they both open to find their way out of the restaurant. And Trent and Scrimshaw are still hot on their heels.

EXT. ST. PAUL BISTRO RESTAURANT PARKING LOT -- EARLY EVENING

PRISHA and VERONICA have now exited the building. They stand in the bistro's parking lot. You can hear TRENT and SCRIMSHAW making their way to the same doorway.

PRISHA

(to Veronica)

It's always the same plot twist, too. Outsider has like some kinda weakness or shortcoming. ... And every time, it's their secret weapon.

VERONICA
 (intrigued, despite the
 weird circumstances)
 Your weakness is your superpower.

PRISHA
 Bingo.

Trent, having just arrived outside with Scrimshaw, suddenly looks like he's ready to kiss his new friend. An entire paradigm seems to have just shifted beneath Trent's feet.

TRENT
 (bursts into Veronica's
 and Prisha's
 conversation)
 Your weakness is your *superpower*...
 My God, these girls are geniuses!

Having suddenly realized his objective, Trent speed-walks back into the bistro, announcing his discovery to LESLIE, who's still inside.

TRENT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (to Leslie as he makes his
 way back inside)
 Leslie, full speed ahead! All
 systems go! We have our TROD Talk!!

VERONICA
 (under her breath)
 Er, I mean. "Girls"?

Scrimshaw looks on his prey, a woman out in a parking lot, a woman who has just one troublesome interloper in her entourage standing in his way.

SCRIMSHAW
 (to Veronica and Prisha)
 Ladies, how you doing?

PRISHA
 Well, thank you so much for coming
 to our show taping this afternoon,
 mister... I'm sorry what was your
 name again?

SCRIMSHAW
 Scrimshaw. Brett Scrimshaw.

PRISHA
 Mr. Scrimshaw, my colleague and I
 are grateful for the time you could
 take out of your busy schedule.

VERONICA

(nodding)

Yes... very grateful. Very busy.
Very colleague.

PRISHA

Are you parked here, or can we hail
you a cab?

Leslie steps into the parking lot, followed by "Listen Here!" staff who are now moving the recording and sound equipment and other audio and video tech from the afternoon's taping. The workers move their gear toward a nearby rental truck where a loading ramp has been laid down to welcome the rolling racks now being loaded in.

LESLIE

(to Prisha and Veronica)

You ladies good?

PRISHA

(to Leslie)

Absolutely, yes. Thank you. We're
just talking with Mr. Scrimshaw
over here.

SCRIMSHAW

(to Veronica)

It was a pleasure meeting you,
miss...

VERONICA

(comfortably, though she's
never used this form of
address for herself
before)

Thomsen. Miss Thomsen, yes.

SCRIMSHAW

(to Prisha)

And you too, ma'am.

PRISHA

(curtly)

Any time.

Prisha steps over to speak with Leslie. Scrimshaw seizes a moment, at last, to hold a private conversation with Veronica. He hands Veronica his card.

SCRIMSHAW

(to Veronica)

Hey, if you're ever in Chicago,
give me a holler?

(MORE)

SCRIMSHAW (CONT'D)

Always looking for new talent eager
to make waves out in the world.

VERONICA

Thank you, but I like the waves we
make here.

SCRIMSHAW

You sure? This town?

VERONICA

Yeah. I *belong* here.

SCRIMSHAW

Ah. Have a lovely night.

Scrimshaw walks away from the parking lot, down a nearby street. The camera pulls back on a gear load-out from the bistro, as Leslie and Prisha help move some bags of patch cords and mics into the truck. Veronica walks toward the door to find Trent hovering, awaiting affirmation.

TRENT

(to Veronica)

We have a TROD Talk now.

VERONICA

I know, Trent.

TRENT

Can't believe how I came up with
the idea.

VERONICA

Yes, looking forward to hearing all
about it.

END.